Applying for the Mandela Washington Fellowship: Pitching yourself in the personal essay

Whether you're writing an essay to apply for admission to university, graduate school or the Mandela Washington Fellowship, your job is the same: demonstrating to the decision-makers that you're the person to choose. That's the essence of a "pitch," whether in business meeting or a personal essay.

In the case of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, focusing on "how to write a personal essay is the most important," according to Edward Monster, public affairs officer in Malawi who reviews applications for the Fellowship. "Too many applicants used the essays to describe 'big-picture' problems in their country or region," said Monster, "but failed to describe exactly what they as individuals were doing to confront the specific challenges in their communities."

Emphasize outcomes

"Sometimes we focus on things we've done" — an initiative or a job we undertook — "but we don't talk about what the result of that was," said executive coach Patty Beach, who is a managing partner of Leadership Smarts. By describing the tangible benefits created by your previous work, you can overcome what Beach calls the "'So what?' factor," which leaves the decision-makers uncertain whether your work had any measurable value or not.

Remember three things

Beach suggests thinking about three things before writing an essay: what you're good at (your natural and cultivated talents), what you're passionate about (the area to which you'll direct your talents), and how what you're applying for will help further your goals. "If you can effectively communicate those three things, you put yourself in the best position to be selected."

Enough but not too much

Shawn Abbott, dean of admissions at New York University, has seen more than enough admissions essays to know what works when it comes to selling yourself to an admissions board. He suggests limiting your personal statement to one page. "Admissions officers are reading hundreds, if not thousands, of applications. We have to be able to read quickly, and you want to capture our attention. One page is enough."

Think before you share

Abbott also advises giving thought to what parts of your worldview to emphasize in a personal essay. The Fellowship application emphasizes what you have done and plan to do to support your communities, so focus on your actions and outcomes. There may be different taboos for you to avoid for different types of applications, so think hard about what they might be before you put pen to paper.

My voice for Burkina Faso

Martine Nikiema (Courtesy photo)



My name is Martine Nikiema. I am a citizen of Burkina Faso, which means "the land of upright people." It is a landlocked country sandwiched between Ghana, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Niger, and Benin and is at the heart of the West African savannah.

The purpose of this article is to amplify the voices of my fellow countrymen and women who are fighting for democracy and the rule of law. Six months ago, I was privileged to be one of the Mandela Washington Fellows and to participate in the 2015 Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) representing my country. It was a real honor for me to be selected from a pool of over 30,000 continental applicants to travel to the United States and participate with other young leaders in YALI.

In the weeks following the announcement of the Mandela Washington Fellows, I wondered why I had been selected, since I never saw myself as a charismatic leader.

Last June I left my country to begin a new chapter in my life that would include big challenges, each of which I was determined to see as an opportunity. On the plane, I looked in tears at my country and our people. The biggest question that sprang to my mind was how and when my country would see the needed social changes it craves: food for children, better education and justice for all, human rights, and gender equality. I am optimistic because my people are hardworking and brave, and because I believe in a better future. Every day my people do their best to to improve their living conditions. But it takes good leadership to make these changes happen. How can they reach these objectives if there are not good leaders to guide them?

I spent my first six weeks at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, learning business and leadership skills. That period made me look back on my past life and what I have done in my community, fighting for better education by helping children in rural areas get light through solar energy. After six weeks, I finally understood that leadership does not necessarily mean taking huge action, but rather taking any action that changes the lives of people for the better. And good leadership is a determining factor in the process. A leader is a team player and a good listener who gives people a chance to speak and hears their voices. He or she is able to inspire others and guide them to continue their journey with more hope for success. I started at that moment to believe in myself, but I also realized that I still have a long journey to be an effective leader. My main objectives became:

- Empowering hopeless youth who no longer believe in justice.
- Inspiring females to continue their education in order be a change-maker in their community.
- Getting donations and support to provide solar lamps to children in remote areas.

Upon completing my course at Dartmouth, I travelled to Baltimore to participate in an internship with Bithgroup Technologies, a renewable-energy developer. During my six- week internship, I continued working on my objectives. I was in a hurry to return home and share my experience with my family, friends, and community, and to start my dream of being a good leader.

Citizens of Burkina Faso protest against the recent coup in Ouagadougou. (© AP Images)

On September 16, 2015, less than a month before elections, a military coup changed the situation in my country. The president, the prime minister, and two other ministers were arrested by the presidential guard (RSP). The citizens of Burkina Faso protested to denounce this anti-democratic and terrorist act — fighting by using their voices for peace, human rights, and democracy.

Their relentless resistance against the oppressor finally won them the much-needed victory they longed for for over half a century. Despite the death of 15 people and the wounding of 200 more, this victory is a watershed in the democratic process of my country. It will help heal many years of military brutality and impunity, as well as gross abuses of human rights. My country has regained its sovereignty and dignity. Today I am proud to be a citizen of Burkina Faso. I am even tempted to call it — like the United States — "the land of the free and the home of the brave."

This victory is obviously not to the advantage of some regional powers and leaders who continue to torture their people. The military in most African countries do not serve their people but are at the service of the elites. The army in Burkina Faso gave an example of patriotism when they fought back to protect their citizens against the presidential guards. They will go down in history as paragons of an authentic national army on the African soil.

I am grateful for the opportunity I was given by the U.S. government to learn skills of leadership and be part of the solution for the transformation of African societies and particularly of my home and beloved country, Burkina Faso. I know it is incumbent upon us, the next generation, to be an example for all countries facing challenges. Our future depends on us, we the people; our destiny is in our hands, and we cannot allow anyone to destroy it.

I can use my voice to educate, inform, and defend our interests and to show the world the true meaning of democracy. Each population has the right to choose their leaders through legitimate elections. I raise my voice to say to nations that believe in democracy and the rights of individuals and countries to determine their own destiny: This is the time to take action. Time for more freedom, more democracy, and more justice. We, the people of Burkina Faso, are ready to face anything to reach our goals. I raise my voice to ask you to stand with us for justice.

The views and opinions expressed here belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the YALI Network or the U.S. government.

#YALI Network Events Across Africa

Aspiring entrepreneurs in Kigali, **x** Rwanda (Courtesy photo)

In the two months since we launched #YALILearns, there has been a flurry of activity among #YALINetwork members organizing and sharing events in our Facebook face2face group. Dozens of meetings and hundreds of people have shared their knowledge and connected with other young African leaders across the continent.

Papy Sibomana got together a group of prospective young entrepreneurs in Kigali, Rwanda, to teach business and entrepreneurship using the YALI Network Online Courses. There was also discussion of the #YALINetwork and its benefits for younger entrepreneurs and an overview of the Mandela Washington Fellowship application process.

Discussing the activities of the Regional Leadership Center at a meeting in Addis Ababa. (Courtesy photo)

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Frehiwot Negash joined with Yigrem Ashenafi, Asmeret Gebre, Edie Zachs and Helina Stiphanos to organize a #YALILearns event and even created a separate Facebook group.

"It was so inspirational," Frehiwot said. "We look forward to our next monthly event."

Zakariyyah Freeman Musa, a Nigerian working in Kenya, connected with the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania to develop a #YALILearns event at the American Corner in Zanzibar. Thirty people discussed the YALI Network Online Courses on leadership and took the quiz to get their certificates.

YALILearns meeting in Harare (Courtesy photo)

Southern Africa was particularly active, including Vincent T. Mabotja's event in South Africa to discuss xenophobia and another that involved a march against corruption. In neighboring Zimbabwe, several events took off.

"#YALILearns is an amazing tool to seeing people grow and develop ideas into actual projects and livelihood," said Kelvin Tinashe Mutize after a networking event he organized with #yalicreatives in Harare.

Munya Bloggo, a 2015 X Mandela Washington Fellow, teaches business in Gweru, Zimbabwe. (Courtesy photo)

Munya Bloggo shared another Zimbabwe event, this time in the central part of the country where several Network members used the YALI Network Online Courses to discuss business planning and modeling at the American Corner in Gweru.

"We had a feisty discussion with students on how we can apply the lessons to a local context," Munya said, before adding a competitive element to #YALILearns. "I think when it comes to advancing education, Zimbabweans go at it like it was the Olympics."

Just north, in Zambia, Patience Chisanga shared her expertise at a multi-day event.

"I spoke to 25 young talented and exceptional filmmakers about redefining entrepreneurship, the importance of turning art into a business, the basics of developing a business idea, a business plan, and how to deliver a business pitch to investors," she said.

YALINetwork members take a quiz on leadership for a YALINetwork certificate at a meeting in Zanzibar, Tanzania. (Courtesy photo)

To the west, Ruddy Kielo Lingela held an event that utilized the YALI business lessons in Lubumbashi, #DRC, at the American Space there.

"More than 20 young entrepreneurs were present," he said. "I was much impressed (with the audience). All the participants arrived 30 minutes before the launch of the meetup. The Congo is changing my friends."

Over in Ghana, Oxford Bonsu put together a group of 320 undergraduates at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology for an event.

A huge YALILearns event in Ghana saw 320 people show up for a meeting organized by Oxford Bonsu. (Courtesy photo)

"I used resources from YALI Learns to engage the students, and there was a positive feedback," he said. "#YALILearns is a sure way to give back to your community and to empower young Africans to make real difference."

If you want to hold your own <u>#YALILearns</u> event, you do not need any special tools or experience, just a willingness to gather people together and share knowledge. Use our courses or your own material, but please do share the results with us on our <u>#YALILearns</u> feedback page.

Patience Chisanga, a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow, teaches about filmmaking at a YALILearns event in Lusaka, Zambia. (Courtesy photo)

Watchful eyes keep elections fair

An election observer at a polling station in Nairobi during Kenya's 2013 election (© AP Images)

The surest way to get fair elections, according to experts, is to have as many eyes as possible on every step of the process. With several countries in Africa holding presidential elections in October and November, citizen groups that monitor elections will play important roles in assuring that the results are fair and credible.

The Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (<u>GNDEM</u>) represents 190 watchdog groups in 75 countries on five continents. In 2012, the organization launched the <u>Declaration of Global Principles</u> for <u>Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations</u> in a ceremony at the United Nations. The document spells out standards for citizens who work to keep elections fair.

The document matters because monitoring doesn't work without a careful plan. "You can't monitor everything," said Michelle Brown of National Democracy Institute (NDI), a nonprofit organization that supplies technical assistance to GNDEM's local watchdogs. "They have to focus," Brown said. "They have to figure out what are the salient issues that could have the biggest impact."

A woman registers to vote using a fingerprint reader in Lagos, Nigeria. (© AP Images)

NDI helps the monitors create checklists for use in the field. Groups such as NDI train both long-term observers, who monitor how electoral boundaries are established, voter registration and ballot qualification, and short-term observers, who focus on election-day procedures.

What does it look like when election monitoring is thorough? "Nigeria is a great example," Brown said. Four prominent civil-society groups representing diverse interests came together to form Project Swift Count to monitor the 2015 Nigerian general election. "They did a very good job of early outreach and making people aware of who they were," Brown said. "They had a nationwide network, really nice pre-election reports, and then, in a very timely way, released their election-day findings."

Volunteering your time to help groups that monitor elections is a great investment in fair elections in your country. Contact these organizations in <u>Cote D'Ivoire</u>, <u>Guinea</u>, <u>Mali</u>, <u>Tanzania</u> and <u>Uganda</u> to see how you can help.

Comment mobiliser l'électorat ? Un ancien de la campagne d'Obama partage ses tuyaux

« Motiver les électeurs à voter est nécessaire, mais ce ne doit pas être une fin en soi », souligne Lex Paulson, ex-militant coordinateur pour la campagne de Barack Obama en 2008, aujourd'hui professeur de théorie du plaidoyer à Sciences Po Paris. Pour mobiliser l'électorat et remporter le scrutin, un candidat doit « établir un dialogue avec les gens ».

Les élections présidentielles approchent au Burkina Faso, en Côte d'Ivoire et en Guinée, et elles soulèvent avec elles des problèmes récurrents : le désenchantement des électeurs et le risque de violences post-scrutin.

Lors d'une discussion en direct avec des jeunes issus de ces trois pays, Lex Paulson a partagé des outils concrets pour mobiliser la population et améliorer la démocratie.

« L'acte de voter n'est pas seulement de choisir un leader. C'est un droit fondamental. »

Voter est un principe démocratique qui nous rappelle que le gouvernement nous appartient, pas l'inverse, explique Lex Paulson. « Il faut dire aux gens que seuls ceux qui ont voté auront un poids électoral – c'est-à-dire qu'ils pourront ensuite demander à leur candidat de rendre des comptes et de tenir ses promesses. »

Comment mobiliser les électeurs avec un petit budget ? Paulson suggère d'avoir une stratégie bien ciblée :

- identifier des électeurs potentiels, aller à leur rencontre avec un message très clair, qui fasse le lien entre le candidat et des problèmes concrets rencontrés par les habitants au quotidien ;
- mobiliser les nouveaux électeurs (les jeunes, les personnes marginalisées...etc.);
- cibler les événements et les lieux de rassemblement (marchés, parcs, mariages...etc.).

Construire et animer un réseau

Mais pour Paulson, il n'y a rien de tel qu'un électeur motivé qui, à son tour, va mobiliser d'autres électeurs.

Pour cela, l'équipe de campagne du candidat doit établir un dialogue. « Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'organiser un concert où les gens vont s'amuser, explique-t-il. Il faut leur demander de donner leurs coordonnées pour pouvoir ensuite les contacter, communiquer avec eux et leur permettre d'exprimer leurs idées. »

Exploiter les ressources gratuites à votre disposition

Paulson recommande d'utiliser les réseaux sociaux et de créer un site web : « Vous devez communiquer régulièrement pour entretenir le dialogue, et ponctuer chaque message avec un appel

à l'action. Tous vos messages doivent compléter et renforcer vos activités sur le terrain. »

Il encourage également les militants à se servir des moyens les plus répandus en Afrique, tels que les SMS, la radio, et bien sûr, la rencontre en personne avec les gens.

« Vous êtes les ambassadeurs de paix. »

Les périodes électorales sont chargées d'émotions, et les résultats peuvent provoquer la colère. La violence, même, parfois. « C'est à vous de montrer l'exemple, insiste Lex Paulson. Rappelez aux gens que l'élection n'est pas la fin. Elle sera suivie par une autre élection. Entre chaque élection, vous pouvez agir. »

Pour anticiper ce genre de problèmes, « nous nous rendons dans les zones où il y a eu des violences dans le passé et nous discutons avec la population », explique un participant de Côte d'Ivoire. « Nous organisons un grand carnaval où tout le monde va porter un t-shirt blanc et où les responsables des partis politiques vont être présents, continue un participant de Guinée. Et nous diffusons des spots à la radio, lus par des enfants, sur l'importance pour chacun d'avoir une élection pacifique. »

3 questions et réponses :

Comment les acteurs de la société civile peuvent-il favoriser la participation des femmes aux élections ?

« La question des femmes ne doit pas être séparée de tous les autres enjeux politiques », répond Lex Paulson. Les leaders de la société civile doivent chercher comment les enjeux tels l'emploi, l'éducation, la santé ou la sécurité touchent les femmes, de manière à pour pouvoir argumenter précisément lors des discussions avec d'autres associations. « Et chaque association, quelle que soit sa problématique, doit avoir un espace dédié au recrutement des femmes », recommande-t-il.

Comment inclure les personnes handicapées du début jusqu'à la fin des élections?

Il faut commencer par faire une évaluation des barrières, physiques ou juridiques, qui empêchent les personnes handicapées de participer au processus démocratique, puis proposer des réformes. « Avoir des demandes concrètes va vous aider à susciter l'intérêt des candidats et des partis politiques, assure Lex Paulson. « Et n'attendez pas qu'on vous invite pour prendre part aux débats qui ont lieu pendant les élections. Les personnes handicapées doivent commencer par faire valoir leurs droits elles-mêmes. »

Comment lutter contre la fraude électorale?

Les membres de la société civile doivent être solidaires et agir en partenariat avec les ONG qui se préoccupent des questions de transparence, telles que le NDI, le Carter Center ou l'IRI. Et surtout, il faut prendre des notes. « Il ne suffit pas de dire qu'il y a eu des fraudes ou que l'élection a été mal gérée, prévient Lex Paulson. Il faut penser comme un avocat et rassembler les données et les témoignages. »

Que pouvez-vous faire?

Les gens autour de vous savent-ils à quel point il est important de voter? Quelles initiatives concrètes allez-vous entreprendre pour encourager les gens à voter dans votre quartier? Partagez sur Facebook:

Applying to be a Mandela Washington Fellow: Tips from a 2014 Fellow

Nigerian entrepreneur Adepeju Jaiyeoba meets President ▼ Obama. (White House/Pete Souza)

The 2016 Mandela Washington Fellowship application is now open! Adepeju Jaiyeoba, a 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow, has put together the following tips for YALI Network members on preparing a great application.

Story of change

What's your driving force? What motivates you to do the work you do? What's your story? Do not spend a paragraph on this. Trust me, a line is more than sufficient.

Understand the questions asked

Don't be too quick to provide answers to the questions. Understand the questions asked, as every question is aimed at discovering certain things about you as an individual and leader.

Demonstrate practical knowledge of the needs of your community

Let your writing show you understand the problem of your community. Connect the problem to reallife stories and situations to drive home your point and let your solution not be in doubt.

Emphasize that you are a leader who takes initiative

Communities across Africa have varying challenges. In your own little corner of the world, before the opportunity to apply for this fellowship, tell about how you have been helping your community solve pressing problems.

Proofread your application

Every year, thousands of applicants apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship. The applications are not scored by robots or machines — they are scored by human beings, which is why you should really proofread your application and rid it of errors so you do not turn off the markers.

Don't confuse the marker

A lot of times we are involved in a series of businesses as well as running different NGOs, which in many cases are unrelated. For example, you could be selling fabrics, be into waste management, run an NGO on climate change and still want to keep girls in school. Completing the application may be a real challenge to you as you may want to put all of your various aspects into the application. This

may only end up confusing the marker. Let there be a sequential flow in your thoughts and writings so you don't get the marker scrolling up to check your name and be sure he's still scoring the same application he started out with.

Visit <u>yali.state.gov/apply</u> for more tips and information on preparing a great application.

American Conservationist Learns from Kenya

Join #YALIGoesGreen this month. Learn how to get involved at yali.state.gov/climate

By Karin Rives

Adam Whelchel of The Nature Conservancy with Wangari Maathai, the founder of Kenya's Green Belt Movement. (The Nature Conservancy)

After practicing and preaching environmental conservation for the past 60 years, The Nature Conservancy knows a thing or two about strategy. So when Adam Whelchel, a conservation director for the U.S.-based group, traveled to Kenya in 2009, he thought he would teach the Green Belt Movement in Nairobi how to, well, run an environmental movement.

Instead, he says, "I walked away as a student."

In fact, the 38-year-old Green Belt Movement (GBM) is a formidable force in the struggle to protect East Africa's threatened water and forest resources. On its list of accomplishments is the planting of some 45 million trees, not a small feat in a country where competition over land is fierce.

Whelchel said he has been humbled by GBM's remarkable ability to overcome conflicts and bring together people with different interests. "I saw that in every village I worked with them. People show a tremendous pride over their relationship with GBM," he said.

He was also impressed by the commitment he witnessed. GBM staff, he said, will put in 14-hour days to try to save their country's environment — and then still have energy for a joke at the end of the day.

The ability to laugh, no matter how big their challenges, Whelchel said, may give the conservationists in Africa an edge over many of their peers in other parts of the world.

Planting a Grass-roots Organization

Wangari Maathai, who founded the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in environmental conservation and women's rights. (© AP Images)

GBM's world-renowned founder, Wangari Maathai, began small in the late 1970s, gathering village women to grow seedlings and plant trees. After operating under the government's radar during the early years, her rapidly expanding movement caught the attention of Kenya's then-president, Daniel arap Moi. He and others in power didn't appreciate the fact that women were organizing on their own.

In an old public speech shown in a 2008 documentary about Maathai's work, Moi can be seen criticizing a "certain woman" who had dared to rally other women to plant trees. "According to African traditions," Moi said with a wry smile, "women must respect their men."

But Maathai continued, fearlessly, to organize communities in the country's semi-arid countryside, winning over more women and eventually men, teachers, children and politicians. In 2004, she became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts. Maathai stayed involved with the group's advocacy campaigns while writing articles and books at a prolific pace until her death in 2011.

Moi left power years ago, but East Africa's environmental challenges remain. Today, GBM enjoys support from the Kenyan government as well as from seasoned environmental groups such as The Nature Conservancy. GBM staffers in Nairobi, London and Washington continue working to recruit new activists and obtain funding to increase the organization's impact.

Strategy for a Growing Movement

The Green Belt Movement teaches environmental education to Kenyan schoolchildren. (The Nature Conservancy)

Whelchel traveled from his office in Connecticut to Nairobi to help GBM take what he calls "a business approach to conservation."

"It's a way to think strategically about what priorities do we have and what actions need to be taken to achieve those priorities, and to then measure the outcome," Whelchel said. "Without such plans ... your messaging isn't as sharp. People want to see a return on the investments and how their efforts have made a difference, and without having a way to measure, you're less effective in telling that story."

The Nature Conservancy returned Whelchel to Kenya in January 2011, this time to conduct a workshop focused on how GBM can incorporate watershed management in its strategy for Kenya and other parts of Africa.

Trees are critical to a healthy ecosystem because they help retain rainwater and replenish groundwater supplies. Kenya, however, has lost almost its entire forest cover in the past half-century due to illegal logging, tea plantations, and pressures from a growing population that must clear land to grow food.

Today, only 6 percent of the country is covered by trees.

Deforestation has aggravated droughts and also affected energy supplies. Kenya depends on hydropower for 44 percent of its electricity, making the entire economy vulnerable to water shortages.

"The prognosis is not good, and one thing they need for sure is more forest that can capture and filter more rainwater for the people who need it," Whelchel said.

Wanjira Mathai, the daughter of the movement's founder and its international liaison, said she remembers her mother telling her and her siblings at an early age to fight for what they believe in. Mathai (who spells her last name without the double a) has since earned a business degree and transitioned from a job in public health to work full time for GBM.

"We have benefited tremendously from the exchange of technical knowledge that has enabled us to not only do our work more efficiently, but also talk about our work in ways that demonstrate the impact," she said.

Today, GBM is stronger than it has ever been as it networks with similar organizations in other parts of the African continent and with people in power.

"It's one of the things that has become so wonderful," Mathai said. "The government is the custodian of these forests, so we need to be working with them."

Farming's Climate-Changed Future

A hand spread over dry, cracked earth.



Agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa — which employs 65 percent of Africa's labor force and accounts for 32 percent of its gross domestic product — has looked the same for generations: a majority of smallholder farmers growing crops and raising livestock on land they use to both feed their families and earn their living. But with the effects of climate change already being felt across the continent, those who want to continue to earn their living through farming will need to adapt to the realities of the effects of climate change.

A report from the World Bank forecasts a 4 degrees Celsius global warming by the end of the century, with the sea level rising up to 100 centimeters. Droughts are expected to increase in central

and southern Africa, along with unprecedented extremes of heat. The same report predicts increased annual precipitation in the Horn of Africa and parts of East Africa that will increase the risk of flooding. With 96 percent of cropland in Africa being rain-fed, the continent is dependent on the climate. And the climate is changing.

"The main people affected by climate change in my country are small farmers," said Aicha Sako, a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow from Mali who works on climate adaptation strategies. Sako says that practices such as choosing crops than can adapt to longer rainfalls, crop diversification and landscape mapping (determining different soil types and how they can be used most efficiently) will be important to small farmers' survival.

Studies show that crops such as maize, sorghum and millet are vulnerable to the elevated levels of carbon dioxide that climate change will bring. Plants such as wheat, rice, cassava and yam, however, are more resistant to elevated carbon-dioxide levels — and in some cases will even have a positive response to those conditions.

"Farmers need to think about which crops they can use, where they use them and when," said Sako, "to save energy and make their businesses sustainable."

Join #YALIGoesGreen this month. Learn how to get involved at yali.state.gov/climate

#YALICHAT on climate change with Mandela Washington Fellows

2015 Mandela Washington Fellows Peace Musonge and Andrew Chikomba joined the YALI Network for a three-day #YALICHAT on climate change, agriculture and green solutions. Read the highlights below.

Peace is a scientist and social entrepreneur from Uganda, and founder of Uganda Artemia Fish Farms Enterprise, which researches innovative green technologies to diversify organic aquaculture produce. She is passionate about using science and technology to engage and improve the livelihoods of communities.

Andrew founded Gemwitts Enterprises, a green solutions company, in Zimbabwe in 2012. He has a passion for technology and entrepreneurship and serves communities by providing honest and practical solutions to their problems using appropriate technology and renewable solutions.

From James in Uganda: How can climate change move away from lip service to action?

Peace Musonge: Hi James, action starts with you. By taking the initiative to learn about climate

change and educate your local communities you will make it more of an action than lip service. There are many cost effective ways you can adapt to take action and be part of the Eco-generation (tree planting, recycling, adopting green lifestyle habits (http://goodgreenhabits.com/category/ecofriendly/)

Andrew Chikomba: That's an interesting question James, generally people's perceptions to a situation determine their action towards it. It is true that most people are still skeptical about the reality and seriousness of climate change when the scientific evidence is so overwhelming.

However we need to realize that some of these skeptics are intelligent people who can see for a fact that global warming is in total existence.

The only plausible reason that they have not turned from lip service to action is that probably they have not come to a consensus and agreement on a way forward in terms of how to combat climate change issues. Our values, ideologies and cultural world views towards global warming need to change, and as much as science is telling us that Climate change is occurring and science is telling us what is causing climate change, science has not specifically told us how to respond to it.

Those responses and solutions need to be relevant to specific communities. People need solutions that are practical and relevant to their environments otherwise they will simply not adopt them. I believe that we need to involve the affected communities in coming up with strategies and solutions that are relevant to them so that they can take ownership and actually put to action their solutions.

James: Andrew Chikomba well said my take on this is that can we make room for real change movers to attend the so called summits for climate change? It hurts all the time to hear world leaders sitting in these summits year in year out. The conferences are attended by highly placed individuals yet if given opportunity I would make these women and men I see the tree nursery beds, the rural farmers it would be nice to pick people with the best practices to be role models.

Muzo in Zambia: Won't sustainable green solutions hinder Africa to develop?

Muzo in Zambia: Won't sustainable green solutions hinder Africa to develop? Because as far as i am concerned no known country has ever developed or showing signs of developing solely relying on green energy.

Peace Musonge: It is a vital question to think about given the history of development has been dominated by fossil fueled economies. China has moved about 680 million out of poverty by mostly burning coal. However, there are reasons for thinking positively about the transition. Current practices from the energy sector has found that some countries would save a lot of money from moving to green energies. For instance diesel powered generators mean that some Africans are using the most expensive electricity. In general one should consider that the world is transitioning to a future of less fossil use meaning more taxes on carbon and more investment opportunities for green solutions. So while the use of fossil fuels is inexpensive with short term benefits the use of green energies especially for Africa will be more beneficial in the long term. Africa can not afford to move in the opposite direction as the world moves forward. There is a risk that fossil fuel infrastructure will be of little value in the future. Moreover, green energy technologies are increasingly competitive with fossil fuel. With a mix of green energy solutions it is possible to

achieve long term benefits. However, as we transition fossil fuels will remain a part of energy strategy but with more emphasis on green solutions. This requires more support from western countries who can invest more in research to come up with technologies that will be cheaper for Africa. On the other hand many African's will in the mean time be exploring the use of cheap fossil fuels if the world lends an unhelpful hand.

Thato in South Africa: I just want to know what kind of sustainable technologies can be used to prevent climate change?

Peace Musonge: Sustainable technologies should aim to mitigate and not prevent climate change. Preventing climate change is not a realistic way to think about managing the impact of climate change. It is more useful to think about technologies that will reduce the effect of climate change. Preventing may involve dangerous measures that could make our climate unsafe. However, the new and old sustainable technologies that have the potential to reduce the effects of climate change include 1) carbon capture using afforestation , wetland restoration, better farming with less fuel or burning bushes 2) renewable energy technologies such as solar energy and hydroelectric energy , nuclear energy-not a favorite for many, hydrogen energy, bio-fuels from waste.

Deon in Namibia: What are some of the most effective ways to engage the community on climate change?

Deon in Namibia: Hello, Thank you both for taking time out for this yalichat. I would really love to hear your opinions. My first questions are....

Peace, given your professional background can you tell me, what are some of the most effective ways to engage the community? How can I effectively mainstream climate change to young people, business leaders and policy makers to create awareness using technology and science?

Andrew, the idea of providing practical and honest solutions to the green energy technology is genius and I salute you for it. In my country there is a shortage and need of that? I would like to pursue it and wish to know from you, what are the first steps, who are the key stakeholders involved to make it a success? What are the critical important factors I have to consider, like the challenges I could avoid?

Peace Musonge: Hi Deon thanks for your question. Community engagement using science and technology is quite important when sensitizing different stakeholder groups about climate change. However, these groups require different strategies so as to effectively transfer climate change knowledge through science and technology. As a scientist, i always simplify technical jargon for the layman. Young people can be reached using creative and simple info-graphics highlighting issues about climate change and this strategy could be adopted for business owners. In order to influence policy as a scientist i have to give evidence based research and this helps influence policy makers to tackle different environmental issues.

Deon: Thank you very much. I really appreciate the info!

Jean in Kenya: How should people prepare for and help prevent climate change, particularly flooding?

Jean in Kenya: When Climate change affects us as individuals, it also affects the environment and businesses as well. In Kenya, it has been predicted that come October, we'll have Elnino rains. How can we brace ourselves for the same and what can steps can we take, however minimal, as individuals from the grassroots and as a group to prevent a repeat of the same in future?

Peace Musonge: Climate change is related to floods and rainfall in many ways. But it is floods that are usually difficult to link to climate change. Floods may be caused by human influences such as land use change for urbanization. Rainfall has a more direct link to climate. Climate change affects areas differently. For example the East African region is likely to get more rainfall while rainfall in southern Africa is likely to decrease.

This finding is from scientists who have used mathematics to see what the future is like. It is not 100 percent certain that this will be true but it is the best estimate we can make from the current understanding of the factors that affect climate. For floods, we can assume that those people living close to the coast will be affected by sea level rise. The oceans are expanding because of increased temperature and the ice is melting. so this may create problems for coastal regions. We can also assume that for areas that receive increased rainfall , for example, East Africa, floods may increase. We should be aware that some floods and rainfall are not linked to climate change but to climate variations that are natural. There are floods and rainfall events that are linked to natural changes in the oceans like El nino or La nina. It is not clear if climate change has enhanced these events.

Fiacre in Benin: How can we adapt our agriculture to have a good production, despite irregular rainy seasons?

Fiacre in Benin: One consequense of the climate change is irregularlity of the rainy season. is there a hope for the comming generation? how can we adapt our agriculture to have a good production?

Peace Musonge: One of the key impacts of climate change is the variability in the weather patterns, which will mainly affect Africa's rain-fed agricultural sector. Yes, there is hope for the next generation. For agriculture to thrive in the future, African regions will have to prepare for a warmer climate. This warmer climate could lead to the emergence of new challenges such as new diseases and pests which could threaten the food security, economic prosperity and social welfare of the local communities. To cushion these communities, knowledge from crop and climate model studies could be provided and advice given on how to cope with the future changes.

Other recommended adaptation measures include:

- 1) Income diversification to reduce dependence on agriculture and identifying novel farming systems, which involve livestock and fisheries.
- 2) Implementation of new technologies to improve water availability
- 3) Crop expansion in cooler regions.
- 4) Promoting conservation agriculture practices especially in water harvesting, nutrient, and pest & disease management.

- 5) Farmers need to change their cropping systems and adopt new crop varieties since some crop types will not be able to be thrive with elevated levels of CO2. Climatic studies have shown that some crops such as cassava will tend to be resilient to the temperatures, as they possess drought tolerant characteristics. Crops like potatoes, beans and sorghum are most likely to have reduced yields under higher temperatures. This suggests that cassava may replace crops like sorghum.
- 6) Use of crop varieties that are resistant to the projected warming among others. Identification of crop varieties that have a high water efficiency ratio, dry matter conversion ratio, positive response to temperature extremes and elevated CO2.

Read all the great questions and answers from the YALI Network and Mandela Washington Fellows:

Does climate change affect you? Announcing a #YALICHAT on green solutions and climate change with Mandela Washington...

Posted by Young African Leaders Initiative Network on Wednesday, September 23, 2015

Applying to be a Mandela Washington Fellow: Common Questions

For each of the past two years, staff from the U.S. Department of State have answered questions from YALI Network members about applying for the Mandela Washington Fellowship of the Young African Leaders Initiative.

As Network members begin to prepare their applications for the 2016 Mandela Washington Fellowship, we took a look back at some of the common questions we've answered in person on completing the application, the process for applying, and what applicants need to know about the Mandela Washington Fellowship.

On how Mandela Washington Fellows are selected ...

You have to be a citizen of a sub-Saharan African country and have to be residing in a sub-Saharan African country. You should be proficient in English, and between the ages of 25 and 35 at the time of your application. You should have a proven record of leadership or accomplishment in public service, business/entrepreneurship or civic engagement. We also like to see a demonstrated commitment to public or community service, to volunteerism or mentorship. We are looking for someone who has the ability to work cooperatively in diverse groups and who respects the opinions of others — someone with demonstrated knowledge or experience in the track for which you are applying. The essays and the applications that you submit are very important, because we want to see people who've had a track record of making change and are looking forward to making change as we move forward. One must be energetic and positive. The most important criteria is to have a real commitment to return to Africa and put your new leadership skills into use to benefit your

community and country.

On English proficiency ...

We're looking for applicants who have English that is good enough to participate in an academic program in the United States. There is no TOEFL test, but we ask applicants to self-rate their English on their applications. There are also the essays that must be well-written in English. There will be an interview process and we will get a feel for whether you actually can speak English or not. It will become apparent whose English is strong. If you make it to the semifinalist round and are interviewed at the U.S. Embassy or somewhere else in your country, the staff there will of course be holding the interview in English.

On applying from a different country than where you permanently reside ...

We are looking for candidates who are living in sub-Saharan Africa and who are committed to the future of their continent and home country. For the purposes of this program, we don't look at Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt as part of sub-Saharan Africa. Interviews for the Fellowship will be occurring in sub-Saharan Africa. If you are applying in sub-Saharan Africa but in a different country in sub-Saharan Africa from which you normally reside (maybe you are studying or working in another country), the embassy in the country in which you're currently living will likely be able to do the interview for you and then transmit that back to our embassy in your home country to make a decision.

On setting quotas ...

We value diversity in the United States and hope to reflect this in the Washington Fellowship program. We want a diverse group of countries, ethnic groups, religions, gender, and physical abilities. We are looking for a diverse group of opinions as well. We are looking for the full range of people who make up African society. We expect to have people participating in this program from every country in sub-Saharan Africa. Ultimately, we want to make sure we have a representative group of individuals from across the continent as a whole.

On what documentation to include with your application ...

The key thing we are looking for is demonstrated leaders. It really is up to you what documents you decide you'd like to upload, so I would just suggest that you pick the documents that you think best reflect either your professional expertise or your leadership capacity. If you have trouble demonstrating that in a documented form because of various reasons outside your control, we would still like to take a look at your application. An important part of the application is the essays where you have the opportunity to demonstrate what you have accomplished and what your goals are for your future.

On which Fellowship track to choose ...

A candidate who has experience in a particular track (Business & Entrepreneurship, Public Management, Civic Leadership) will be a stronger candidate than someone who has never worked in that area. But we welcome all who want to apply, both those who currently work in a particular track and those who have an intention to do so in the future.

On submitting multiple applications and ranking the tracks ...

You cannot submit several applications and it will not improve your chances. If you submit several applications you will be disqualified. Do not submit more than one application.

On the role of educational achievement in the selection process ...

We will consider what your formal education is, but you will not be disqualified if you do not have a formal diploma or degree. Formal education plays a role in terms of how we evaluate your application as a whole. We really are looking for Fellows who are demonstrated leaders in their communities and their countries. Africa is a diverse continent and we know that leaders come to their achievements through both formal and informal means.

On what we expect upon your return to Africa ...

We hope that you bring back new skills and new enthusiasm. What we really hope for is a multiplier effect — that you share with your friends, family and colleagues what you saw, learned, and perhaps taught others in the U.S. so that this experience grows. And we hope that you continue to stay in touch with us.